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**Data Access Research Task Force**  
**Quarterly Report**  
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The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) created the Data Access Research Task Force (DART) with the overall goal of discovering ways to improve the data collection mechanisms and processes used both by the OPI and the school districts in Montana. The information gathered from the project will be incorporated into process improvement efforts within the OPI and the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) K-20 grant activities. One of the objectives of the SLDS K-20 grant is to improve the data collection infrastructure in order to ease the burden of data submission to the OPI on the schools and districts in Montana. If you have questions about this project, the contact is Susan Murray ([smurray@mt.gov](mailto:smurray@mt.gov)).

DART is committed to working towards resolution on the following issues that were identified in last year's electronic survey. As part of this commitment, the DART team is dedicated to issuing quarterly reports to schools and districts so progress could be identified. The DART team is also responsible for reporting on these issues monthly to the OPI Data Governance Committee to ensure the work is being done. The issues are summarized below, along with OPI's original response, an update on each issue for this quarter as well as action steps for the next quarter.

**Issue #1 – Redundancy:** There were two different issues regarding redundancy brought up by districts. The first issue was how the OPI collects data – districts feel that they provide the same data about their students and employees multiple times within one OPI application or system. The second issue is that the districts feel that they are providing their data multiple times to multiple programs throughout the agency, which is also a frustration.

**Original Response** - The OPI will undertake an agency-wide inventory and analysis of applications and data collections. The OPI will move toward identifying one source for data and using that source to pre-populate that data in other applications, so districts only enter it once, but can still see what information the OPI already has.

**UPDATE:**

The OPI has completed a comprehensive inventory of data collections and applications this quarter in an effort to identify redundancies in both data collections and in collections across programs. 76 applications and 4 paper collections were inventoried, and a total of 1,565 data elements were reviewed.

**Next Quarter:** The inventory and some preliminary analysis are complete. Now the OPI will use the results of the inventory to resolve redundancies between applications and between programs in an effort to reduce the data collection burden on districts.

**Issue #2 - File Uploads:** Many districts reported a problem with file uploads. These problems can be grouped into three types: issues with uploading data to AIM, uploading data for Special Education, and issues with file size when districts try to upload into AIM.

Original Response - As a result of the survey, AIM program staff worked with the AIM vendor (Infinite Campus) to resolve the file size problem and that issue has been resolved. The OPI also believes that the issue with Special Education data has been resolved at this time. In the next year, the OPI will be working to create a new data transport method through the K-20 Data Project which may be leveraged to provide new methods for file uploads to multiple applications. As part of the K-20 Data Project, the OPI will also conduct interviews with high schools and K12 districts to determine additional issues with file uploads.

**UPDATE:**

Two parts of the original issue (uploading data to AIM in large file sizes and uploading data for Special Education) are considered to be resolved by the OPI. If districts continue to experience problems with either of these, we would appreciate feedback (send via email to Susan Murray at [smurray@mt.gov](mailto:smurray@mt.gov)). The K-20 Data Project has signed with IBM to begin the work on the new data transport system. This work has begun and will continue on through the summer, with Pilot and Statewide implementation this fall.]

**Next Quarter:** Work will begin on the data transport system as part of the K-20 Data Project.

**Issue #3 - Data Entry Errors/Inaccurate Data/Discrepancies in Data Submitted:** Districts reported that at times data entry errors occur in manual data entry, and those errors move into other systems, such as the data warehouse. They also describe problems when the data reported doesn't match the data submitted to the OPI.

Original Response - The OPI will begin to simplify and standardize their validation and certification processes as much as possible. Where appropriate, the OPI will also convert paper data collections to electronic versions for simplification of data entry.

**UPDATE:**

As part of the application inventory that was completed in issue #1, paper collections were also analyzed. Now the OPI will begin to migrate the paper collections to web-based applications as appropriate.

**Next Quarter:** Paper collections will also begin to be migrated to electronic collections. Validation and certification processes will be standardized through the work being done in the data transport system.

**Issue #4 - Timeline for Data Collection:** Districts feel that the OPI makes too many data requests in the fall. Superintendents and data specialists are also concerned that they will miss a deadline because they are unaware of the need for the data or have missed a notice.

Original Response - The OPI is in the process of creating a Master Data Calendar and is identifying ways to make this readily accessible to school district personnel. The calendar should be available to districts within the next six months. Once the calendar is developed, the OPI will identify the busy collection periods and determine if they can be spread out to ease the burden of those collections.

**UPDATE:**

A simplified version of the Master Data Calendar was created and sent out to participants in the SAM New Leadership conference this summer. Prototypes of a Master Data Calendar have been created and the OPI has

solicited feedback on ideas for a successful Master Data Calendar. OPI leadership is also sending out coordinated lists of due dates through the MASS representatives to facilitate awareness.

**Next Quarter:** Work on an electronic version of the Master Data Calendar (housed in the GEMS Data Warehouse) will begin.

**Issue #5 - Technical Issues:** Districts identified multiple technical issues with OPI applications, including issues with Citrix, submission of data to ADC, and PowerSchool uploads to AIM.

**Original Response** - The OPI has stopped using Citrix as a portal to its applications. The ADC application has been retired. ADC data will be entered through the new TEAMS application beginning this fall. As part of the K-20 Data Project, the OPI will work with High School districts to improve file extract and load processes. The team will explore using information gathered during this project to improve and/or correct the issues described with PowerSchool.

**UPDATE:**

Citrix is no longer required to access any applications at the OPI. ADC is now being collected through the TEAMS application.

**Next Quarter:** Work on the data transport system will begin next quarter as part of the K-20 Data Project. The project team will use this opportunity to follow up on PowerSchool issues.

**Issue #6 - Differing Submission Mechanisms:** Districts feel that there are too many applications, all with different log-in information and passwords. This makes it difficult for district personnel to keep track of changing passwords and the correct log-in protocol.

**Original Response** - The OPI has begun a project to implement an identity management solution. This will offer district personnel one log-in ID and password for all OPI applications. This project is targeted to complete in mid-2014.

**UPDATE:**

The Identity Management team issued an RFP to identify a vendor to work with them on this Identity Management issue. However, there were no responses to this RFP. The OPI is now working with the State of Montana's Information Technology Division (SITSD) to coordinate jointly to put together a legislative funding request for the 2015 session to have this project funded.

**Next Quarter:** Continued discussions with SITSD will be on the OPI's agenda for this quarter.

The DART Issues Resolution Team members are: Dennis Parman, Jim Gietzen, Susan Murray, Anne Rainey, Linda Atwood, and Teri Wing.